

Use of Social Media Tools to Promote a Community Event:  
Analysis and Recommendations for the Madonna Plaza Farmer's Market

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## Introduction

### *Community-based events*

Community-based events involve members of a community where active participation is required, and the setting is generally designed for members to actively contribute to their surroundings. When looking at a community as a whole, the participants should be involved at the earliest stages of the event and objectives are defined as the project continues (Zinn, 2010). Community members are trained and hired based on the principles of the event, and analysis within the accumulated data interprets how the event is coordinated (Zinn, 2010). This establishes the community's views about how the ongoing programs and events are measured to help enhance community assets (Zinn, 2010).

San Luis Obispo is a small community where “economic shocks” or sudden events that challenge the status quo, have the potential to harm or change the environment, (Besser, 2008). Important consequences from such an event can measure the significant harm throughout a rural community (Besser, 2008). Small towns have advantages from these “economic shocks” by generating local awareness through communications that are able to spread rapidly, generating public participation (Besser, 2008). The particular members within the community continue to help define research objectives and actively participate how the project will be organized. The community consists of partners that have a real influence on the projects direction (Community-Based Research Principles, 2010). This is where members are able to ensure that the original goals, mission, and methods of the project are followed. As the community based event is coordinated, members who are trained appropriately help build and enhance community assets (Community-Based Research Principles, 2010). These trained individuals are able to contribute

to how data is analyzed, what particular events are coordinated, and actively participate in the interpretation and distribution of data (Community-Based Research Principles, 2010). This enables the community to make their views clear to the general public within the community and creates a specific goal attainable (Community-Based Research Principles, 2010). Communities should establish productive partnerships between the researchers and community members to ensure that the community based event will last beyond the expectations of a particular project. In order to develop these partnerships, research will help sustain ongoing community programs and provide the greatest possible benefits to the publics within the community (Community-Based Research Principles, 2010). Members within the community have the opportunity to initiate individual research as they start to develop a concrete understanding of their surroundings, and how well past projects have impacted the community (Community-Based Research Principles, 2010).

The relationship between the community and the organization is analyzed through two types of interpersonal relationships. The exchange relationship and the communal relationship help evaluate the relationship or the organization compared to the community by researching the organization and the public (Grunig, 2010). In an exchange relationship “one party gives benefits to the other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future” (Grunig, 2010). The farmer’s market located in the Madonna shopping center has a certain public attracting clientele based on their needs within the community, and it is the job of a public relations practitioner to help perceive the organization based on these publics. The exchange relationship also relies on the benefits from the organization to the public, and expects to receive benefits of comparable value from the other (Grunig, 2010). This type of relationship

is the main concept behind marketing relationships between organizations and their customers, and “is the central concept of marketing theory” (Grunig, 2010). This type of relationship is not the only thing a public relies on, since sometimes the organization gets nothing in exchange for their relationship within the public.

In a communal relationship, the organization and the public are both interested in the benefit of one another, and both parties act in favor of one another even if one gets nothing in return (Grunig, 2010). The main concern within public relations is to convince management that it also needs communal relationships with publics such as employees, the community, and the media (Grunig, 2010). In a public relations campaign, the communal relationship adds value to the organization and message being sent through the media by creating a greater understanding of who and what the organization is doing. Public relations usually attempt the communal relationship first in order to establish the relationship within the organization to the community, in order for an exchange to take place (Grunig, 2010). These types of relationships are defined and analyzed to help understand the importance of having different kinds of relationships within an organization. It is also important to define and understand the quality of relationships that are formed within the organization and the public (Grunig, 2010).

### *Farmers markets gain popularity*

Farmers markets have demonstrated the importance of agriculture and the stabilization within local economies in rural America since 1742 (Gerbasi, 2006). Although these particular farmers markets had a dramatic decline in the 1920s, in response to the advent of the modern supermarket, they increased in the mid-1970s (Gerbasi, 2006). The increase in consumer demand

for local produce has helped launch a national boom in farmers markets across the country, with the numbers growing by more than 260 percent since 1994, when the USDA began tracking the number of markets (Opperman, 2009). The United States Department of Agriculture calculated a 79% increase in the number of farmers' markets between 1994 and 2002 (Gerbasi, 2006).

Farmer's markets have provided a way for local members within their community to buy products directly from the producers, where a trusting and loyal relationship between consumer and producer is established, (Gerbasi, 2006). Research indicates that some individuals see the return of farmer's markets as a step backward into an attribution to where the event does not belong within a community (Gerbasi, 2006). However today, the majority of researchers see farmer's markets as a good thing, and a positive evolution of changing the agricultural economy (Gerbasi, 2006).

Farmer's markets have gained in popularity due to the benefits to farmers, local economies, culture and the local community. This nontraditional organization has led to the organized community event within San Luis Obispo County to promote local awareness of its farmers and what constitutes proper nutrition. In the late 70s and early 80s, businesses in downtown San Luis Obispo started a trend to stay open later than normal hours on Thursday nights (Tartaglia, 2010). This gave members within the community to shop later than normal business hours, and the Downtown Association decided to barricade the six blocks of Higuera Street on Thursday nights so people could still shop late (Tartaglia, 2010). The Downtown Association began arranging special activities and entertainment, and local restaurants collaborated with the association to provide a fully functioning farmer's market in early 1983 (Tartaglia, 2010). The main farmer's market on Thursday nights provides a way to get the

community involved by bringing visibility to both the Central Coast and Downtown San Luis Obispo (Tartaglia, 2010). The event is sponsored by the Downtown Association, and only non-profit organizations were eligible to participate (Tartaglia, 2010). In July of 2006 the market opened up to non members allowing them to participate at a cost of \$80 per night (Tartaglia, 2010).

Today, the local farmers market is dedicated to “thinking green, and reducing the carbon footprint” by providing fresh food for the local community compared to produce delivered by truck (Boyd, 2010). Most of the produce people buy in the grocery store is trucked in or flown from processing facilities, then distributed to warehouses where the food is divided among chain grocery stores like Vons and Albertson’s (Boyd, 2010). The produce within these particular chains is grown in California, Arizona, Washington, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, China and various other states and countries creating a gap between the consumer and the produce (Boyd, 2010). The distance produce travels from the farm to a grocery store is greater than 500 miles, crating more fuel consumed and more carbon dioxide released (Boyd, 2010). By shopping at a local famer’s market, consumers are able to reduce the carbon footprint, and generate a healthier climate for the local community (Boyd, 2010). The San Luis Obispo Farmer’s Market came up with these top nine reasons to shop at a farmer’s market, freshness, flavor, variety, flowers, talk to the famers, enjoy visiting with others, supporting local farms, reducing the carbon footprint and buying produce from California (Boyd, 2010).

Researchers have found that farmer’s markets are a way for consumers to reconnect with their food source, establish relationships between the grower and consumer, and buy local products (Gerbasi, 2006). The demand for fresh, locally grown produce and specialty items have

helped the expansion of farmer's markets, and the growing numbers nationwide have demonstrated the continued support from consumers (Gerbasi, 2006). Farmers have benefited from this growing trend, as profits have been measured at a 40-80 percent profit margin (Gerbasi, 2006). The local economy is greatly affected through 'spillover effects' by supplementing the farmer's incomes and an associated increase in spending at nearby businesses where markets are located (Gerbasi, 2006). Tourism within a community is increased as the nature of the market brings a social and cultural nature and stabilizes a sense of community (Gerbasi, 2006). Some studies have indicated an increase in employment opportunities within the local community, something that has been increasingly important especially in today's unstable economy (Gerbasi, 2006).

Another benefit farmer's markets provide, are the opportunities to showcase entrepreneurial businesses, and small business development by providing vendors with the opportunity to create a stable income (Gerbasi, 2006). The market provides a stimulating social environment that encourages experimentation and a niche market for vendors to test their products or services to particular publics (Gerbasi, 2006). This helps gain business, marketing, leadership and communication skills, to succeed in larger business opportunities (Gerbasi, 2006). The most obvious economic impact of farmer's markets is the potential to increase the farmers' household income, and this makes small-scale farming profitable, and supplement an income (Gerbasi, 2006). When farmers participate in the community-based event, they are exposed to new potential sales outlets, that include and are not limited to wholesaling and selling to restaurants (Gerbasi, 2006). By creating these relationships within the community, farmers are able to generate a substantial income that benefits their profession, and creates a recognition to

the product that is produced seasonally (Gerbasi, 2006). The farmer's market also generates enough business to keep local and commercial stores from closing, or becoming a victim to the decline in the economy, and local businesses around San Luis Obispo can survive. Many store's hours have adjusted to the time in which each market is operated.

*Public Relations tools to promote farmer's markets*

Public relations is an informational function for businesses, organizations and companies to gain public awareness, and create relationships within the media for successful collaborations (Marconi, 2004). Successful ventures begin with well-crafted plans where objectives and goals have been achieved, and this is where the public relations plan defines the targeted audience for the effort, set goals and priorities (Marconi, 2004). The specific objectives within a public relations plan are distinct in order to measure how successful the strategy was, and sometimes the goal is strictly name recognition and awareness that can be measured at a later time (Marconi, 2004). The main objectives of a public relations plan can help identify particular actions a company wants to take, and creates greater awareness within a community (Marconi, 2004). When developing a message, it is important to consider who is being addressed and if the message is appropriate enough for the employees, volunteers, customers, vendors, trade media, community members and others who are a part of the targeted audience (Marconi, 2004).

Public relations tools are encouraged for ongoing communication, promoting particular events and creating interpersonal relationships within a community. By utilizing these tools, organizations and businesses are able to become recognized and successful through collaborating with different sources throughout the media to encourage support for local farmer's markets. The



Internet is the most powerful tool for public relations practitioners and clients, as it has become easier to reach out to particular publics (Breakenridge, 2003). The internet also allows the client's message to be quickly distributed to various outlets as frequently as needed by having a solid strategy in all mediums (Breakenridge, 2003). As technology continues to be an ongoing evolution of different theories, sciences and measurements, it is important to have a "story worth telling, a list of media contacts that is carefully researched, and an attention-grabbing hook that no computer could ever generate," (Breakenridge, 2003).

The public relations plan helps define the target audience or public, goals, priorities and specific objectives to a distinct audience (Marconi, 2004). Public relations tools help businesses and organizations develop strategic communication within a community, where the business or organization does not have the experience (Smith, 2005). Community relations and special events planning and promotion, are both two main areas public relations is extremely useful in the developmental process of communications, and advertising is used as a tool to generate these communications (Smith, 2005). When looking at public relations and how the tools within public relations can help a business or organization it is important to look at the nine steps that are generally followed in order to have a successful public relations campaign (Smith, 2005). These include, analyzing the situation, the organization and the publics, establishing goals and objectives, formulating action and response strategies, using effective communication, choosing communication tactics, implementing the strategic plan, and evaluating the strategic plan (Smith, 2005). The most important tool or strategy here is using effective communication to promote to the Madonna Plaza Farmer's Market.

Several different approaches to communication are used and relate to different fields within an organization and deeply rooted within relationships within the organization, in this case, the Madonna Farmer's Market (Smith, 2005). Logos are special kinds of symbols that allow the audience to become familiar with the particular organization, as it has a lasting impact on prospective customers, (Smith, 2005). By creating a logo for the Madonna Farmer's Market, a visual symbol is created to promote recognition to the location, and can stabilize brand recognition within the realm of social media (Smith, 2005). This logo can be used on different social media sites such as twitter and Facebook to help the audience become familiar with the particular event. In order for a logo to be effective it must present the right message, be memorable and appropriate for the organization (Smith, 2005). Another important communication tool within social media is the language used to promote and inform the organization (Smith, 2005). Language can also be seen as a symbol to an organization, and the appropriate ways to communicate a message should be considered when writing on Facebook and Twitter (Smith, 2005).

One particular farmer's market in Athens, Ohio found the vendors participate in the market for more than a chance to gain an income; they feel that the market builds and reinforces social networks that has been a major part of how well they sell their product (Gerbasi, 2006). At the Athens farmer's market, one particular function served by social networks is the ability to exchange knowledge about farming techniques, crops, pest control, and other agricultural issues directly from the farmers themselves (Gerbasi, 2006). Through social networking farmers are also able to connect with each other on a different platform and utilizing new media, and encourages communication within the local community. Clark Yandle, the vice president of the

Merchants Association found the farmer's market, in Ocala, Fla. found that the local farmer's market "gives producers a venue to sell their goods, and it is an excellent source for homeowners to get high quality and reasonably priced vegetables," (Opperman, 2009).

### *Social media tools*

The growing number of people online has made a new field for marketing a business or company, and through displaying an organization online, viewers are able to become instantly informed and aware of what the organization or company is doing (Maldonado, 2010). Through this new way of marketing a company, social media has entirely changed online marketing and has opened up a new two-way line of communication that expands beyond the amount of people that are generally communicated on a daily basis (Maldonado, 2010). An online marketing firm called Oneupweb devotes its entire marketing strategy to online social media where the business can promote itself to other companies due to the needs within their demographic (Maldonado, 2010). "People want to connect with real people, and that's what I think makes social media so fun and so intriguing for marketers," says Lisa Goddard, advocacy and online marketing director at the Capital Area Food Bank of Texas in Austin (Maldonado, 2010). Goddard uses social media tools, such as Facebook, the Food Bank's blog, and Twitter, to promote awareness of hunger issues in her community, and have become important tools within her social network (Maldonado, 2010). These social networking sites also create awareness across a large audience where information is able to spread rapidly, and can be accessed at any time (Maldonado, 2010). All businesses need to promote themselves, and there's a marketing position that targets each

specific audience such as sports teams, hospitals and various organizations, to these specific marketing departments to keep their image and brand in the public eye (Maldonado, 2010).

Social media including the popular, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have quickly become a part of our lives ever since the internet has drastically changed the way we communicate and function (Baron, 2009). News is able to travel at a rapid rate, and the ability to quickly get information from a particular audience becomes more convenient, the interaction between members of the online community are able to transmit messages at any given rate, rather than directly from the media (Baron, 2009). Social media has changed everything, making our work faster, more direct, more interactive, and styles and preferences have changed (Baron, 2009). While social media has become a part of an enormous amount of people's lives, in a sense it changes nothing when it comes to businesses, where relationships and character remain extremely important (Baron, 2009).

Within a business or organization, it is important to remain a trustworthy company, and keep a good reputation on behalf of a grounded character to generate a diverse public, and community (Baron, 2009). "An Oxford study showed clearly that the long-term impact on share price of a company following a crisis is most directly related to the public's perception of the character of their leaders during the crisis as evidenced by their actions," (Baron, 2009, para. 4). The most important thing within an organization is the building of relationships with specific people the organization is targeted towards (Baron, 2009). There has been no evidence of how trust is related or shown through social media, and the character of oneself does not rely on this tool either, however, social media, and whatever forms of communication we rely on today, are critical in communicating the actions that demonstrate character and build trust (Baron, 2009).

The San Luis Obispo Farmer's Market has a Facebook page with 4,204 fans, a section where notes have been created to share news releases, comments and ideas that are happening throughout the Thursday night farmer's market, and 117 photos and counting. This has been an effective tool in communicating to the community, and generating involvement from different entertainment, restaurants and activities throughout the market, and updates are provided on a weekly basis.

### Problem

In order to promote the Madonna Plaza Farmer's Market through social media, the senior citizen community must first become aware of this new form of social networking within new technology. The already existing Facebook page promoting the San Luis Obispo farmer's market is focused on Thursday nights, and the Saturday market could easily be incorporated. Online social media tools gives people the opportunity to become involved within the community simply and effectively through allowing users to create a recognized identify of their own, (Lenert, 2007). However, for this specific demographic, for the Madonna Plaza Farmer's Market, the elderly makes up most of the demographic for this particular community-based event. This leaves senior citizens with a disadvantage when it comes to the operation with new technology. Senior citizens are becoming more enthusiastic technology users once they are able to establish the usefulness and usability of the internet (Cohen, 2010). Internet usage among elder Americans is growing steadily, but still ranks low among other users, and less than half of the over 65 are online (Cohen, 2010). The main reason why senior citizens aren't utilizing this new medium, according to a recent study by the Center for the Digital Future, is not because the technology is

too confusing or too expensive, but they aren't aware they need the Internet (Cohen, 2010). Since this particular demographic is not aware of the advantages to having a computer at home, many seniors choose not to purchase one, and only five percent of non-users reported that the cost was too prohibitive (Cohen, 2010).

Other reasons senior citizens aren't using the internet has to do with the generation gap that has more to do with the age process and impaired hearing, poor eyesight, arthritis, physical ailments, reduced cognitive skills that include memory loss and shorter attention spans, all limit their potential use to the Internet (Cohen, 2010). Seniors who are online have proven to be enthusiastic users of new technology, creating profiles on social networking sites, texting friends and family, and banking online, according to Micro- soft's research, co-conducted with AARP (Cohen, 2010). Once they recognize a new technology's value, older adults are quick to incorporate that technology into their lives (Cohen, 2010).

One way for the older generation to utilize this new medium is shown through specific cases where social interaction remains a priority but the means of transportation may be limited. The Internet is an important tool in communication, face-to-face contact is vitally essential, and many of the traditions through social gatherings, town hall meetings and dances have kept the older generation alive (Cordero, 2009). Seniors have proven that these weekly or even monthly gatherings are an important part of their lives (Cordero, 2009). The means for transportation has been a rising problem among this generation, and the Internet may serve as an essential tool to stay connected (Cordero, 2009). Danielle Leitch, executive vice president of client strategy with MoreVisibility in Boca Raton, Fla. found that the new forms of social networking particularly Twitter is "a free micro-blogging service that is an easy way to stay on top of people and conduct

ongoing, easy, informal communication with peers and families, along with some businesses now too,” (Cordero, 2009). Leitch added, "in the U.S., 10 percent of Twitter users were between 55 and 64, nearly the same amount of users as those between 18 and 24, which accounted for 10.6 percent of the total. Facebook is even more on the high growth scale for seniors, in particular, women,” (Cordero, 2009).

An advertising and marketing company titled GlynnDevins developed LINK, a online community site similar to Facebook and MySpace, built specifically for older people (Cordero, 2009). Brandi Towns, an account executive for GlynnDevins found that many seniors living in retirement communities own their own computer, and many have learned how to email, and read the news online (Cordero, 2009). Today, the 65-year-old has been using the Internet at work for more than 12 years, and seniors older than 60 will continue to be a growing segment of the U.S. Internet culture, growing from 17.7 million users in 2006 to 25.3 million by 2011 (Cordero, 2009). Other websites and Internet communities have developed specifically for the older adult, such as Silver Planet where information regarding health, money, entertainment and important issues are offered (Cordero, 2009).

## Literature

### *Senior Citizens and the Internet*

By taking a closer look at the demographic for the Madonna Plaza Farmer’s Market, senior citizens, are often accompanied by various physical and mental problems including deteriorating health and cognitive functioning (Shapira, et al., 2007). These changes within the body contribute to depression and anxiety disorders associated with social withdrawal,

dependency and suicide (Shapira, et al., 2007). These symptoms also include feelings of isolation and loneliness, fears of death, reduced social ties and a loss of one's regular social network and support group (Shapira, et al., 2007). Research by Shapira, et al. (2007) was conducted experimenting with 22 older adults who age averaged at 80 years old, to see how the use of computers and the Internet contributed to these seniors' well-being. The results showed a significant increase among the participant's well-being and sense of empowerment after using computers and the Internet (Shapira, et al., 2007). Their cognitive functioning, interpersonal interactions and sense of empowerment all significantly grew, and all showed signs of control and independence (Shapira, et al., 2007). Of those participants before the experiment, all had shown a sense of powerlessness, mental and physical stress, the loss of economic security, deterioration in the ability to influence and to make a social or political difference, greater dependency on others and increasingly negative attitudes in society toward old age (Shapira, et al., 2007).

The Internet has become an accepted, routine means of communication for many people, including older people, and has created new opportunities for people in distress when traditional resources are unattainable (Shapira, et al., 2007). The Internet is also able to function as a type of therapy and counseling where online support groups can be found (Shapira, et al., 2007).

Computers and the Internet can enhance the quality of life of older people, and Internet-based communication is more convenient and affordable enabling social needs to be met more easily and directly (Shapira, et al., 2007). When seniors are involved various types of online social or political activism, they are able to contribute feelings of self-worth (Shapira, et al., 2007). The Internet is able to retrieve medical information that has shown to promote self-confidence and



help reduce anxiety to patients (Shapira, et al., 2007). Other activities such as, online shopping, banking, gaming, donating and learning are effective ways to overcome physical handicaps (Shapira, et al., 2007). The use of computers and the Internet can empower older people, contribute to their quality of life and help in coping with this group's typical mental and physical difficulties (Shapira, et al., 2007). The Internet is a relatively new phenomenon, and the portion of older people who use this new form of technology is small compared to younger generations (Shapira, et al., 2007). Of those older individuals who are starting to use the Internet may find that aging might then become less difficult, and these individuals are able to be more independent, less socially isolated and more cheerful (Shapira, et al., 2007).

Through focusing on how the Internet can meet the needs of the elderly, services and applications such as online shopping, money management, health education, social, political and spiritual involvement contribute directly to older people's independence (Shapira, et al., 2007). A survey conducted by McMellon and Schiffman (2002) showed that the involvement in various online behaviors and activities contributed to older people's gain in personal control and empowerment (Shapira, et al., 2007). Internet use among older people tends to be associated with greater sense of well-being, compared to the claimed negative relationship between Internet usage and psychological factors (Shapira, et al., 2007). A positive relationship between older people's use and knowledge of computers and the Internet has shown positive life satisfaction, overall well-being and self efficiency (Shapira, et al., 2007).

This research conducted by Shapira, et al. (2007) used 22 older people, nine men and 13 women aged 70-93, and of these participants had an average of 11.43 years of education, and had been retired for an average of 17 years (Shapira, et al., 2007). Two were bachelors, seven were

married, two were divorced and 11 were widows (Shapira, et al., 2007). Twenty six other older people where there were nine men, 17 women aged 70-93 were used as a comparison group (Shapira, et al., 2007). Of this other comparison group, they had average of 10.31 years of education and had been retired for 17.47 years, and of them there was one bachelor, three were married, two were divorced and 21 were widows (Shapira, et al., 2007).

Another study where senior citizens were surveyed for their Internet and computer research was conducted by Stark et al. (2007) and found that computer usage among this older generation has increased. Seniors are using their Internet for e-mail to interact with family members, or improve their contact with their families (Stark et al., 2007). Among those 65 and older, men were more likely (34 percent) than women (21 percent) to use the Internet (Stark et al., 2007). Women seem more likely than men to value the Internet for the opportunities it provides for connecting with others including friends, family, and coworkers, and an examination of trends in Internet usage for men and women of all age groups revealed that women are more likely than men to use the Internet to send and receive e-mail (Stark et al., 2007). The results from these large-scale studies indicate that senior citizens are increasingly making use of computers and the Internet, particularly e-mail, as a means of communication with friends and family members (Stark et al., 2007).

Another survey where Internet usage from teens to seniors was conducted by The Advertising Age studied how Internet habits play an increasingly prominent role in peoples lives (Gervey, 2000). According to the survey, conducted by Applied Research & Consulting, New York, 89 percent believe that “everyone, everywhere, will soon be online, and that the advent and refinement of new technologies, particularly broadband, 81 percent, and wireless Internet

connections, 92 percent, will continue to make the Internet faster and more convenient” (Gervy, 2000). Currently Internet users say the Internet makes their lives easier, in particular to keeping in touch with different people (Gervy, 2000).

### *Using Facebook and Twitter*

The number of social networking sites has increased within the last couple years, and have allowed individuals to construct a public or private profile, communicate with other users, view and navigate through connections they may have with others and establish a place where a mini network of communication via the Internet has been made possible (Taraszow et al., 2010). The main reason people are connecting through Facebook and Twitter is to obtain constant communication and maintain relationships with people who share a common interest or individuals who share a connection (Taraszow et al., 2010). Facebook and Twitter allow users to navigate through these popular activities that include; finding friends, dates and jobs; networking or looking for new acquaintances; extending one’s network; updating others on activities and whereabouts; sharing information, photos, videos and music; receiving updates about events; inviting people to events; getting updates from friends; presenting an idealized presentation of oneself; sending messages privately and posting public testimonials (Taraszow et al., 2010).

The use of Facebook and Twitter to promote businesses have become essential marketing tools when generating a business or organizations goods and services to improve sales (Plank, 2010). Information can be shared with friends and customers to promote current events, updates and pictures that are important to many Internet users (Plank, 2010). Some businesses are using these social networking sites as a way to invite fans and friends to come to certain events, and

can be easily viewed through other peoples pages (Plank, 2010). One business owner, Michelle Robertson used Facebook for an open house event for Hestands Floral and Gifts a small store in New Mexico, where Robertson was able to interact with customers and fans were able to see what the store has to offer (Plank, 2010). This is just one example of how small business owners are utilizing this new form of social media for an advantage in the eye of the consumer.

### Case Study

The farmer's market located at the Madonna Plaza shopping center is held every Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. in the parking lot near Bed Bath and Beyond and Staples among other retailers. In late January the Downtown Association took over the control of the produce vendors at farmer's market, and the farmers quickly became concerned with this new policy (Cornejo, 2010). The initial reason for this shift in management stemmed from the lack of communication among famers and the association, and as of January 28 The Downtown Association became the main operator of all produce at the market (Cornejo, 2010). The San Luis Obispo County Famers' Market Association managed the produce sales at all markets for more than two decades, and as of February 9, 2010 the Farmer's Market Association regained management of the produce sales (Cornejo, 2010).

The main public for the Madonna Plaza Farmer's Market generally consists of senior citizens and families. The individuals who come to this farmer's market are active individuals who practice a healthy lifestyle, and are generally free on the weekends. This public is available to come to the market on Saturday mornings to collect fresh fruits and vegetables. After attending the market for two Saturdays in January, February and March, I have observed the

main target market to be senior citizens (Image 1, Image 2, Image 3 and Image 4, Appendix).

The main interest that this public shares is a sense of community involvement, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, active members of the community, and another thing they significantly share is the area of town where many families reside. Although young families and some young adults attended the market, it was incomparable to the amount of younger adults who attend Thursday night farmer's market held downtown San Luis Obispo on Higuera Street.

The demographic for this community-based event are older adults from age 30 to senior citizen who enjoy being healthy and active, hold a well paying profession or are retired, and enjoy living a sustainable and environmentally friendly lifestyle. Younger active adults also fit this demographic, who enjoy getting fresh produce from their local community. Farmer's markets are another reason members of a community are able to stay healthy, according to the March 5, 2010 Gallup poll, "Good Health Habits the Norm in Slimmest U.S. Metro Areas," started collecting data in 187 metro areas in 2009, in order to review the most and least obese metro areas throughout the United States (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.



Obesity in America has been an ongoing struggle, and remains as America's top health concern today. San Luis Obispo/Paso Robles, CA ranked as the fifth least obese metro area in the nation, and measured at 17.6 percent where a body mass index was measured and the results use the respondents' height and weight (Mendes, 2010, see figure 2).

Figure 2.

*10 Least Obese Metro Areas*

	<b>% Obese</b>
NATIONAL AVERAGE	26.5
Fort Collins/Loveland, CO	16.0
Boulder, CO	16.6
Barnstable Town, MA	16.9
Colorado Springs, CO	17.2
San Luis Obispo/Paso Robles, CA	17.6
Reno/Sparks, NV	17.7
Santa Cruz/Watsonville, CA	17.9
San Jose/Sunnyvale/Santa Clara, CA	19.0
San Francisco/Oakland/Fremont, CA	19.2
Denver/Aurora, CO*	19.3
Bridgeport/Stamford/Norwalk, CT*	19.3

\* Denotes a tie

Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index

GALLUP

The Gallup-Healthways Healthy Behavior Index measure exercise, eating and smoking habits, where nine out of the 10 areas ranked in the top third, and common among residents of the 10 least obese metro areas (Mendes, 2010; see Figure 3).

Figure 3.

*Healthy Behaviors in the 10 Least Obese Metro Areas*  
In order by best to worst Healthy Behavior Index rank

	HBI RANK	% Ate healthy yesterday	% Eat fruits and vegetables frequently	% Exercise frequently <sup>^</sup>	% Smoke
NATIONAL AVERAGE		66.5	56.8	49.9	21.1
Santa Cruz/ Watsonville, CA	1	78.9	67.3	61.0	15.0
Boulder, CO	4	69.8	61.2	61.2	8.7
San Luis Obispo/Paso Robles, CA	7	71.3	65.5	55.0	14.0
Barnstable Town, MA	10	71.3	67.0	51.6	19.0
Bridgeport/ Stamford/ Norwalk, CT	11	73.2	62.0	53.1	16.4
San Jose/ Sunnyvale/ Santa Clara, CA	15	72.2	58.2	50.9	13.1
Reno/Sparks, NV	16	70.3	62.8	58.0	22.5
San Francisco/ Oakland/ Fremont, CA	18	71.3	58.8	53.4	13.8
Colorado Springs, CO	27	65.7	58.7	59.4	18.3
Fort Collins/ Loveland, CO	31	65.1	58.0	60.5	20.3
Denver/Aurora, CO	70	65.4	56.1	53.9	20.7

<sup>^</sup>Exercise for 30 minutes at least 3 days per week  
Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index

GALLUP

The majority of the residents in these areas reported that they ate healthy, and eat fresh fruits and vegetables frequently, and exercise at least 30 minutes for three or more days per week (Mendes, 2010). This stands in contrast to the nation's 10 most obese metro areas, where in all but one less than half report exercising at the same frequency (Mendes, 2010). Smoking rates are also lower than the national average across all but one of the least obese areas (Mendes, 2010). The results directly compare to a community's overall wellness and opportunities to live in a healthy and active environment (Mendes, 2010). San Luis Obispo County has made the 10 Least Obese Metro Areas, Healthy Behaviors in the 10 Least Obese Metro Areas, Community

Conditions in the 10 Least Obese Metro Areas and Physical Health in the 10 Least Obese Metro Areas (Mendes, 2010).

First, the organization is analyzed through a SWOT analysis, measuring all of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. In order to gain a thorough understanding of an organization, the SWOT analysis is performed as a way to also understand the organization's performance, reputation and its structure (Smith, 2005). This is an important step to effective communication that can also view what limits the organization from becoming a success (Smith, 2005). The SWOT analysis was performed from two different environments, the external and internal environment where the elements to the analysis can get a better understanding of how the organization operates, and what types of flaws have generated (Smith, 2005). In order to create an effective communication program within an organization it is important to look at the organization, and identify all aspects either negative or positive (Smith, 2005).

The strengths of the Madonna Plaza Farmer's Market include, effective hours of operation to generate a steady flow of consumers on Saturday mornings. The location at the Madonna Plaza allows consumers to be able to park in multiple spaces with multiple handicap spaces as needed, and the area where the market is located does not interfere with the surrounding businesses where customers are shopping. By having a farmer's market that is located in the southern section of town, people are able to attend a market within their neighborhood, away from downtown San Luis Obispo. The location also provides consumers a chance to shop at the other retailers in the plaza, and offers convenience to a weekend routine. Another strength the market utilizes is the layout of the market with the vendors, there is an easy way to shop throughout the market, and based on the product the market is effective. Vendors



that participate in the Saturday farmer's market are able to become connected within the community of San Luis Obispo, and form relationships based on their product, and maintain trust between consumer and producer. The Saturday market also allows consumers to buy products that perhaps they were unable to at the Thursday night farmer's market, and fresh produce becomes available during a weekend, if needed. The quality of produce is also a major strength of the market, as the seasonal fruits and vegetables are fresh and appear to be properly maintained.

Many of the weaknesses overlap some of the strengths of the organization, but should be considered in making the necessary changes to improve the market. One of the main weaknesses is the hours of operation for those who are not able to make a trip to the Saturday market from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Although the parking can be a strength, it is also seen as a weakness in this case, as parking can become congested, and spaces can be occupied by farmer's market customers. The location is also seen as both a strength and a weakness, as the parking lot can appear to be congested, and limited to the number of vendors that can participate. Perhaps a new location within the same general area should be considered to sort out any congestion, and parking obstacles. The publicity of the Saturday market has been limited due to the constant promotion for the Thursday market, and people are generally unaware that the Saturday market exists. There is a strong need for online communication, and networking within the community to generate awareness of the market.

The Saturday farmer's market has various opportunities to become a successful and ongoing tradition within the San Luis Obispo community. With the proper promotion, and constant communication, the market will become a recognized event within the community, and

will also maintain a loyal relationship among its attendees. Through linking information about the Saturday market with the Thursday night market on Facebook, members are able to become familiar with what services are offered and other products the Saturday market provides. The general “fan base” of the Facebook page could grow drastically, as the public and demographic is significantly different compared to Thursday farmer’s market, and the younger and middle aged population will become familiarized to the Saturday market generating more business. By creating a logo for the Saturday market, consumers are able to become familiarized and differentiate which market is being promoted. Another effective strategy for the already existing social media tool would be uploading pictures to the site frequently enough to show the consumers what is happening as they see it.

Many of the threats within the organization have recently pertained to the organization that holds each farmer’s market within the community. On February 2, 2010 a statement from Deborah Cash, the Executive Director San Luis Obispo Downtown Association, explained how the Downtown Association voted to resume management of the farmers at the farmer’s market. Thursday Night Promotions was established in 1983 and took control over the Thursday night farmer’s market establishing management to the farmers. As of February 10, 2010 (as mentioned above) the Farmers Market Association (FMA) remains in control of the management for the market. The FMA has agreed to operate communication and liability to all activities that take place during the market. In order for the Saturday market to become a success in the virtual world, the correct association must be contacted, and until recently it has been established. Opportunities that involve proper promotion will be determined, as the decision was finalized last month.

The threats within the Saturday market are related to how well the Thursday night farmer's market is promoted and operated in comparison to the lack of social networking for the Madonna Plaza. This is an obstacle but does not remain a threat to the actual market itself. One main threat the farmer's market has is the Ralph's market located parallel to the Madonna Plaza shopping center, where produce is also sold. This is in direct competition to the grocery store chain, and could remain a threat as long as the market continues to keep its location. There has been no evidence of negative impact from the Ralph's or farmer's market, but undeniably remains a threat to the larger super market. There is also no evidence of any members of the community that are against this organization, or community-based event.

### Conclusion

Considering the demographic for the Saturday farmer's market, senior citizens are becoming aware of the advantages to the internet, and specifically social networking sites. From the previous findings in various research and surveys, the Internet is a positive tool for senior citizens, and can help improve the overall well-being and functions within their daily lives. Using a social media tool to help promote the Saturday farmer's market will be an effective and useful tool that will be an ongoing process. Having a member of the Farmer's Market Association or communications director within the organization to maintain the social networking sites on either Twitter or Facebook can help generate this demographic in becoming an active participant to their community. The use of these social networking sites are not limited to this particular demographic, and in the long run can help stabilize the Saturday market and generate more customers. Cordero (2009) reported that seniors older than 60 will become the

majority of the population in the U.S. with numbers reaching 25.3 million by 2011. The Internet is a great way to introduce this audience to actively participate in their community (Cordero, 2009).

Facebook and Twitter can both be used as a way to promote awareness by providing announcements, updates and pictures for community members to see what types of events are happening on a weekly basis. The pictures can also provide an easy way to see what seasonal fruits and vegetables, and types of entertainment are at their local farmer's market. Weather updates, and instant communication from the Farmer's Market Association members are also available to inform its viewers. As suggested above, creating a logo for brand recognition in order to differentiate the two markets could help this demographic become aware of which market is being promoted. Through utilizing the social media tool Twitter, pictures and live updates can be posted on a weekly basis informing its audience instantly and effectively, as many of these applications are provided on personal cell phones.

These social media tools, Facebook and Twitter, can create a general awareness reaching a large number of people within a community. The Internet is a great way to communicate and promote events through an organization, that can continue to generate a larger audience and even expand it's demographic. Over time, the Internet will serve as an essential tool in the lives of individuals of all ages, and will generate enough usage to become a familiar technological tool as we find ways to advance in society.

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## Appendix

Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4

